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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000240

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SUBJECT: BURMA: WFP PLANS EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE TO  
EX-POPPY FARMERS

Classified By: DCM Ron McMullen for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: The World Food Programme (WFP) plans to initiate on March 1 a one-year program to assist former poppy farmers suffering from food insecurity. The program will cost about \$4 million and target about 180,000 beneficiaries in the ethnic Kokang and Wa border areas through food-for-work activities, school feeding, and vulnerable group feeding. In addition to consulting with the U.S. Embassy, the WFP Country Director recently met with leaders of the pro-democracy opposition to discuss the new program. The initiative is similar to existing WFP food assistance in Burma and also appears to be closely coordinated with UNODC counter-drug initiatives in the Wa and Kokang regions. We have faxed the project proposal to EAP/BCLTV. End Summary.

2. (SBU) According to the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) Burma Country Director Bhim Udas, WFP plans to target about 180,000 people in the Kokang and Wa regions with a one-year emergency food program to assist former poppy farmers and their families who are suffering from severe food insecurity. In response to an urgent request from the Kokang Authority and the GOB, WFP already assisted about 50,000 poor ex-poppy farmers in the Kokang area during the last three months of 2003.

3. (SBU) The "Emergency Food Assistance to Ex-Poppy Farmers" is planned for the period March 1, 2004 through February 28, 2005 and would include almost 10,000 metric tons of food at a total cost to WFP of just over \$4 million. A March 2003 joint assessment of humanitarian needs, conducted by the UNODC and JICA (Japanese aid agency), determined that farmers in the heart of Burma's poppy regions on average now only grow enough rice to live on for about half a year. U.N. agencies expect food insecurity to increase as pressures mount on local Wa authorities to cease poppy cultivation entirely by 2005. Currently, the average poppy farmer earns about \$160 cash per year from the sale of opium, which represents roughly 70 percent of the farmer's total cash income.

4. (SBU) Based on the findings of a recent WFP rapid needs assessment, WFP will target 90,000 people in the Wa region, 60,000 people in Kokang, and 30,000 in Kutkai, Muse, and other areas in Shan State. WFP will assist beneficiaries through food-for-work activities (50,000 participants, reaching 165,000 beneficiaries), primary school feeding (45,000 children), and vulnerable group feeding (5,000 elderly, disabled, and chronically sick people). WFP currently has a field office in Laukai (Kokang) and to help implement the new program will open two additional field offices (Lashio and Pangsang). WFP expects to implement the overall program through its existing partners, which include CARE, World Vision, and ADRA.

5. (SBU) WFP is planning its emergency food program largely in response to UNODC's appeal for partners to help implement "KOWI" (Kokang and Wa initiative) to keep farmers poppy-free. In the Wa region, WFP will tap into existing UNODC resources including office facilities and a comprehensive database. In exchange, UNODC plans to establish a technical coordination unit (TCU) within existing WFP facilities in the Kokang region as a key first step in implementing its KOWI initiative.

6. (SBU) Udas, the WFP Country Director, says that the WFP food program will be mostly independent of the Burmese regime. However, "NATALA," the GOB's intra-ministerial body that administers border area affairs, will facilitate WFP's program discussions with local authorities in Special Regions #1 and #2 (self-governed by former Kokang and Wa insurgents) and secure GOB permission for static and mobile communications equipment.

7. (C) Comment: WFP's Country Director has submitted a proposal and budget to his Executive Director in Rome, where WFP is expected to make an appeal to donors for support. In addition to his approach to us, Bhim Udas recently consulted with members of the NLD's Central Executive Committee on the emergency food assistance program. (Note: We have not heard the results of his meeting with the pro-democracy opposition leaders. End note.) The new WFP program is in line with

existing WFP food assistance in Burma's central dry zone, with repatriated refugees in Rahkine State along the Bangladesh border, and also appears to be closely coordinated with UNODC counter-drug initiatives in the Wa and Kokang regions. End comment.  
Martinez